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The Agricultural Extension Program In Relation To Farm Income And Farm Life

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THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PROGRAM IN RELATION
TO FARM INCOME AND FARM LIFE*1927
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THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PROGRAM of the United States has as one of its first objectives the helping of the farmer to increase his net income. The Extension Service is attacking that problem from many angles. It put on over a million demonstrations last year to show farm people how to do some particular thing, such as to seed alfalfa, fertilize cotton, cull poultry, balance dairy rations, can vegetables, and make clothing, in a better and more profitable way.

Besides this detailed work, the Extension Service has promoted the larger things of the farm and community. It helped more than 56,000 farmers in 1926 to adjust the management of their farms, looking toward a larger net income. It has helped 440,000 farmers organize 2,800 cooperative-marketing associations, which did a business of over \$183,000,000. In 1926, it helped organize also 5,300 farm loan associations, all looking toward increased net income.

The Extension Service helped the farmer in other large ways to increase his net income. It cooperated with the Federal Bureau of Agricultural Economics in giving the farmer advanced information on world national prospects and needs as regards crop and livestock products. It furnished the farmer information in advance of planting time on what the probable plantings would be in the case of the different crops, so that the farmer might increase or decrease his plantings to conform to the Nation's need, rather than over-plant and thereby produce a disturbing surplus, which nearly always reacts disadvantageously on farm prices.

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This economic service - the intention to plant and breed - that Government and extension forces are rendering farmers is something new. It is only two or three years old, but it has in it the seed of great promise in adjusting production to consumption needs. To my mind, it is one of the largest things that has happened in the last 10 or 15 years to help agriculture and the farmer in a big, fundamental way. The Extension Service is trying to make this economic information real in the practices of the farmer. It is a big job, an educational job - a slow job - but a most significant and worth-while one.

May we give a little attention, now, to the farm life problem and the part extension forces are taking in it. We have made hundreds of surveys, in cooperation with economists and extension forces of the States, to learn the farmer's income; and we find that in practically any community anywhere all that about 60 per cent of the farmers get out of farming is a modest home, a fair living, some friends, and a chance to work with and grow up with their family. Everyone knows there is not large money in farming -- rarely does one get rich at it. It is on the farm, above all places, that we learn thrift and to count the pennies.

Extension work will help some farmers increase their net income, but by far its biggest task is to help men and women have a better home and a larger life, even without a greatly increased income.

The effort of extension forces to help build up the home and rural community life drives at the very heart of the extension problem. Advancing country life is a fundamental part of the Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture and State Extension Services.

Of first importance in the home is a good living. The farm family that furnishes the food for the Nation should itself have first choice. A good table contributes greatly to contentment in the family. The farmer may have that good table as a result, not of an increased income but of a little better planning and a little more work. Fruit and vegetables, meat and milk, honey and flowers should be a part of every farmer's table. The meal is the social event of the day in the farmer's family. It is a time when all the group are together. A plentiful and graceful meal begets happiness and conversation. It is the forerunner of hospitality, the finest grace of the rural home. The stranger or neighbor is invited to stay to dinner. His coming enlivens the conversation of the family. New ideas are presented, new suggestions made. Intellectual stimulus follows. The satisfaction of exhibiting the commendable things of the farm and home are experienced. Hospitality extended invites hospitality in return; and so the farmer and his family go more -- as a result they see more. After seeing, they learn more. Thus a good table leads directly to hospitality, to more social life, to more travel, to more ideas, and consequently to better farming and home making and greater contentment.

Although the beginning of a good home is a good table, coordinate with that is an attractive home. The farmer spends probably 90 per cent of his time within the home or in sight of it. How important that whenever he looks up his eyes shall fall on an attractive home, something that pleases him! The farm woman spends even a larger part of her time wholly within the four walls of the home. So extension forces are teaching home beautification, inside and out.

And this beautification does not altogether or even largely depend on an increased income. The woods furnish abundant shrubbery for screening the foun-

dations of the home. From the same source may be found vines for covering the porch. The smooth lawn is possible, as is the rose beside the door. Extension forces are giving the information and stimulating the desire for a home beautiful and a community beautiful.

Then extension forces are emphasizing the satisfying home -- the home with conveniences in the kitchen and throughout the house. Help is scarce and the work of the farm home exacting. The farm woman, to be a good mother, to be a good companion to her husband and to herself, and to find satisfaction in rural life, must have conveniences to help do her work and give her time to tidy her home, to read, to play with her children, to sing with them, to associate with her neighbors, to refresh her soul.

We want the farm home to have music in it, a radio, running water, and electricity. Extension work, through helping with the farm and home income, is aiding many families to get these things, we believe, and is teaching that they are far more important than to use the money for buying more land to make more money to put in the bank to buy more land.

But demonstrations to show better practices on the farm and in the home, the organization of marketing and credit associations, the distribution of economic information like the Agricultural Outlook and the intentions to plant and to breed, and improvement of practices within the home are still not the largest contribution the Extension Service is making toward increasing farm income and promoting rural life. Of far more importance than these is the mental and social awakening of the farmer and his family that follows in the train of extension work.

The presence of an extension agent in a rural community is a call to action. Farmers and farm women are brought together in committees and groups. They think through their individual farm, home, and community problems; they undertake things cooperatively. They organize associations, conduct meetings, make reports, put on demonstrations, write news items, make speeches, analyze local conditions, make surveys. They get together in large undertakings.

The extension agent is a constant stimulator. He or she will not let farmer Brown or Mrs. Brown be content with a half-way job. The agent points out the fact that this would be a good field for alfalfa; that a silo would probably help increase both milk yields and profits; that an association would help in marketing the cattle and hogs and eggs. The farmer and his wife find it more difficult to stand still than to progress.

The big thing is that, with the extension forces living in the midst of farming people, constantly calling to their attention problems for consideration and decision, the farm family is growing both in knowledge and in vision. This may be inferred from the fact that, in 1926, 220,000 farm men and women acted as local leaders of demonstration groups and that in more than 54,000 communities the farm people cooperated with the extension forces in carrying out the programs suited to local needs. These are leadership and mind-stimulating jobs.

Over 35,000 adult farmers' clubs and 41,000 junior clubs have been organized by extension forces, practically all with men and women leaders. More than 644,000 adults and 565,000 farm boys and girls put on one or more demonstrations in agriculture and home economics, a total of 1,518,000 demonstrations of one kind and another in the open country in one year. Over 587,000 field meetings were held to show and tell the results of these demonstrations, which

were attended by more than 6,700,000 people, mostly from the farms. The farmer and his family are doing things and are being stimulated to do things in substantial degree by the extension forces. This greater interest of the farmer and his wife in the larger affairs of the community and the State, this enlarged mental outlook and vision are the significant things that are following extension work.

Extension work visions the future rural home and the future rural life as the most attractive home and the most attractive life of all the ages, a home that the child leaves with regret and returns to with outstretched arms, a home of plenty -- fields, flocks, orchards, gardens -- of beauty and grace, where intelligence, hospitality, culture, and happiness abound. The folks who feed and clothe the Nation and furnish the revivifying blood of our urban population are entitled to no less. It is on the way. It is all a part of the extension program of the agricultural colleges, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the farmers cooperating, and is being carried out under your own eyes throughout the whole Nation this day.

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